

CHARLIE MELANCON
3RD DISTRICT, LOUISIANA

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY
AND COMMERCE

COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



Congress of the United States House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

October 9, 2009

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
404 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-4031

DISTRICT OFFICES:
8201 WEST JUDGE PEREZ DRIVE
CHALMETTE, LA 70043
(504) 271-1707
828 SOUTH IRMA BLVD., SUITE 107
GONZALES, LA 70737
(225) 621-8490
423 LAFAYETTE STREET, SUITE 107
HOUMA, LA 70360
(985) 876-3033
124 EAST MAIN STREET
SUITE 220-A
NEW IBERIA, LA 70560
(337) 367-8231

The Honorable John P. Murtha, Chairman
The Honorable C.W. Bill Young, Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Defense
Room H-149 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Murtha and Ranking Member Young:

I write today to strongly urge House and Senate conferees to include an amendment offered by Senator Al Franken and adopted by the Senate this week in the FY10 Defense Appropriations Conference Bill. The Franken Amendment (S.AMDT 2588), which passed the Senate on a bi-partisan vote of 68-30, bars funds for contractors who use mandatory arbitration clauses in their employment contracts, clauses that deny assault victims their day in court.

We have all heard the story of Jamie Leigh Jones, an employee of defense contractor KBR, who was brutally attacked and raped by her co-workers while working in Iraq and then held in a shipping container so she could not report the crime. When she returned to the U.S., Jones learned that a clause in her contract barred her from taking her case to court. Instead, it forced her into an arbitration process run not by the U.S. Judicial system but by the very company that failed to protect her in the first place.

It is our responsibility to make sure this horrific event can never happen again. No American citizen should have to sign away his or her right to due process of law. And not a dime of taxpayer money should go to a company that would rather sweep an assault under the rug than allow our justice system to work.

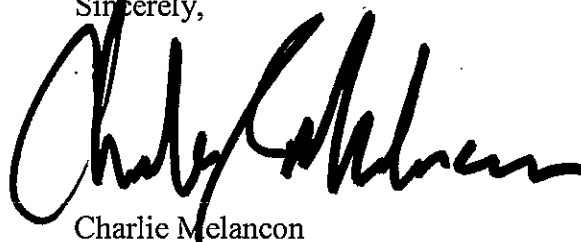
The Franken Amendment is a focused and thoughtful measure that will protect the rights of all American citizens, specifically those working often difficult jobs in some of the most dangerous corners of the world. It will especially protect the rights of American women working in countries that often do not share our steadfast belief in equality and our rule of law.

There are members in both chambers who will argue that the Jones story is an isolated incident and that this is a measure to single out and punish one contractor. They will caution against including this provision in conference. I care not to speculate on their motives, nor do I have any interest in singling out one company over another. But, if we fail to enact this measure, we will have failed to protect the rights and values we were sworn to uphold when we took our oath of

office. We will have failed to protect the fundamental rights guaranteed by our Constitution: equal protection under the law and due process for all citizens. We can not let that happen.

I urge the inclusion of the Franken Amendment in the FY10 Defense Appropriations Conference Bill. I look forward to its passage later this year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charlie Melancon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Charlie" being more prominent than the last name "Melancon".

Charlie Melancon
Member of Congress